

Kansas Health Policy Authority Town Hall Meeting
November 21, 2006
Pittsburg, KS

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments today on the Kansas Health Policy Authority and your direction for the future. I am Jennifer Schwartz, the Director of the Kansas Association of Centers for Independent Living (KACIL). KACIL represents Centers for Independent Living (CILs) across Kansas. KACIL is driven by the following mission statement: *To coordinate efforts within Kansas and the United States to the extent that these efforts will further independent living for all. KACIL will advocate for the civil rights of Kansans with disabilities.*

Centers for Independent Living provide services to people with any disability, of all ages. CILs provide information and assistance to businesses and other entities in the community to increase opportunities for people with disabilities to live, work, and play in all aspects of community life. In 2005 Kansas CILs served approximately 11,600 individuals with disabilities or elderly that came through our doors requesting services. Another 215 people were relocated to the community with assistance of CILs.

CILs serve **any** consumer that walks through their door and requests assistance regardless of labels placed on the individual or the funding sources available to provide for services. CILs build from a foundation of providing 5 core services in Kansas:

1. Advocacy
2. Information and Referral
3. Independent Living Skills Training
4. Peer Support
5. Deinstitutionalization

Centers for Independent Living know, understand, and represent people with disabilities because the majority of their staff and boards **are** people with disabilities. CILs are federally mandated to be consumer controlled, which means at least 51% of their staff and board of directors are people with disabilities. CIL staff are on the front lines every day, working with people on developing community based services, figuring out employment supports, transitioning back to the community from a nursing home, etc.

KACIL's comments fall in line with the suggestions and comments provided by the Statewide Independent Living Council of Kansas (SILCK). We support all of the recommendations from the SILCK. We believe that we need to continue to come together in one uniform consistent system. CILs have a longstanding history of working to build an infrastructure of community based services so that

people with disabilities and the elderly have a choice in where to receive long term care supports and services.

KACIL has worked for years to shift the view of long term care supports and services in our state and across the nation. We would recommend that the KHPA, along with other state agencies work to push a system of long term care services to a consumer driven system of flexible funding that promotes choice. In order for Kansas to make this shift we believe it is essential that the entire system be driven from a philosophy committed to individual choice and consumer direction. We must have a consistent uniform system in place that asks people what they need and provides it. The funding must be flexible and again the consumer must always be encouraged, taught, and supported to make the decisions for him or herself.

The people CILs serve often qualify for the Kansas Medicaid and receive services through the various HCBS waivers in our state. We provide individuals information on the waiver programs, and these are vital answers to the question of needing support services. If a particular waiver has a waiting list, the person might ultimately end up in more costly, restrictive setting such as a nursing home. Kansas needs to make a commitment to choice and independence through providing access to Home and community based waivers if this is what a person chooses. We must move to the next phase of a commitment to NO waiting lists, and making sure that our public policies always offer a rotating door for someone that might need acute care or rehabilitative services, for a period of time, and then provide the open door, from the inside, for the person to get out of the nursing home just as easily as they came in.

CILs also serve individuals who qualify for Working Healthy, a small program within the KHPA that was designed to reduce the barriers people with disabilities face when trying to maintain employment. CIL advocates worked long and hard toward establishing our Working Healthy program here in Kansas, and we are ecstatic about the recent accomplishments of this program, including a state plan amendment that will allow for a person to receive personal assistance services if they need them in order to establish or maintain their employment. People with disabilities are very capable of working and being active, contributing members to our Kansas communities, but at times a person might need additional supports. The current changes to the Medicaid state plan allow for these supports and services. And the program is being set up so it is entirely consumer driven, so that the individual with the disability can choose as much or as little support as they need. Through this we continue to work toward communities where Kansans needs are met, and they take responsibility for the services they receive. We recommend that the KHPA maintain strong support for these very important initiatives provided through this program. This is our system transforming right before our very own eyes!

We believe one of the most immediate ways for Kansas, both state agencies and the legislature can make a commitment toward choice and independence, is through support of Money Follows the Person legislation in our state. For the past three years Kansas has had a proviso for Money Follows the Person, which allows for an individual currently in a nursing home to transition back to the community and have the same amount of funding support them, this funding is transferred to the appropriate HCBS waiver the

person is on. In the past we have been limited through the proviso that would allow for 80 individuals to transition, we believe it is time for Kansas to show their commitment by putting this into state statute with no cap on the number of individuals that may access it. Kansans can have the choice of where to receive their long term care supports or services.

Kansas is currently at a crossroads in terms of how we provide long term care supports and services to individuals with disabilities and those who are aging. We are in the midst of some incredible opportunities with some of the Federal grants funneling to our state. These are our opportunities to grab on and charge uphill into system transformation of our long term care system.

KACIL stands ready to push forward this shift from reliance on institutional based services to a consumer driven system of choice, independence and flexible funding.

Thank you for your time

Jennifer Schwartz
Executive Director
KACIL